OLIVER TWIST

CHARLES DICKENS



SADDLEBACK *Classics*

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ADAPTED BY

Emily Hutchinson

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1 A Hungry Orphan

In a certain town, which I have no reason to name, there is a workhouse. There, the poor of the town toil without pay. On a date that does not matter, Oliver Twist was born in this sad place.

At first, there was some doubt that the baby would live. But after a few struggles, he breathed, sneezed, and let out a loud cry.

Hearing this, the young mother's pale face rose weakly from the pillow. "Let me see the child—and die," she whispered hoarsely.

The doctor frowned. "Come now, my girl. You must not talk about dying yet."

Sally, the woman who had been helping, quickly hid the bottle she had been drinking from in her pocket. Then she said, "Bless her heart, no!"

The doctor placed the child in his mother's arms. She put her cold white lips to his forehead, looked around wildly, fell back—and died. Sally and

the doctor rubbed her hands and chest, but the young woman's heart had stopped forever. "It's all over," said the doctor. "It's a shame. She was a good-looking girl. Where did she come from?"

"She was brought here last night. They said she was found lying in the street. Where she came from, nobody knows," Sally answered.

The doctor raised the dead woman's left hand. "Ah! No wedding ring, I see. The same old story. Well, goodnight."

Old Sally dressed the baby boy. What a wonderful example of the power of dress young Oliver was! Wrapped in a fine blanket, he might have been the child of a rich man. But now that he was dressed in old, worn-out baby clothes, he fell into his place at once. He was a *workhouse child*, doomed to be kicked along through the world, looked down on by all, and pitied by none.

The tiny boy was sent to a baby farm, run by a Mrs. Mann. A wise woman, indeed, was Mrs. Mann. She was very clear about what was good for children and what was good for herself. She kept most of the food money for herself, and fed the children barely enough to stay alive.

As you know, dear reader, this kind of farming

does not produce much of a crop. Oliver's ninth birthday found him a pale, thin child. Unlike many of the children who had come to the baby farm, however, he was still alive.

It was on this day that the baby farm had a most important visitor. It was Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle. Mr. Bumble was a greedy, fat man and quite convinced of his own importance as a minor official at the village church.

"Oliver is too old to stay here any longer," Mr. Bumble told Mrs. Mann. "He must go to the workhouse now." In all the years Oliver had spent with Mrs. Mann, not one kind word or look had ever come his way. And yet he burst into tears when he was led away by Mr. Bumble. The farm was the only home he had ever known.

The workhouse was a fine home for poor people. It gave them a wonderful choice. They could choose to live there and starve slowly. Or they could choose *not* to live there and starve quickly. People who lived in the workhouse got a meal of gruel—watered-down oatmeal—three times a day. Twice a week they were given an onion, too. On Sundays they got half a roll.

Oliver and the other boys were wild with



hunger. One boy began hinting that he might *eat* one of the others if he didn't get more gruel in his bowl. The other boys believed him and quickly held a meeting. They played a game of chance to decide who would be the one to ask for more. The miserable job fell to Oliver Twist.

That evening he went up to the master, bowl in hand. "Please, sir," he said timidly, "I want some more." The master was a well-fed, healthy man, but now he turned pale. He stared at Oliver, his mouth hanging open in shock. Then he grabbed the boy and yelled for the beadle.

The members of the workhouse board were having a meeting when Mr. Bumble burst in. "I beg your pardon, sirs!" he said. "Something outrageous has happened. Oliver Twist has asked for *more!*"

"For *more*?" snorted one. "That boy will be hanged some day," he cried. "I know it."

Oliver was shut up in a dark room for a week. Every other day he was brought to the dining hall. There, he was whipped as an example and a warning to the other boys. A notice was put up in front of the workhouse. It offered five pounds to any citizen who would take Oliver Twist.

In the end, Oliver was given to Mr. Sowerberry, the parish undertaker. Mr. Sowerberry was a tall, thin man, dressed all in black. He took Oliver home to Mrs. Sowerberry, a short, scrawny woman. She ordered the maid, Charlotte, to give the boy some meat the dog hadn't eaten. That night Oliver had a restful sleep among the coffins and coffin-making supplies upstairs.

In the morning Oliver met Noah Claypole, who also worked for Mr. Sowerberry. Noah was a 10-year-old charity-boy, sent by his mother to a charity school and dressed in a charity uniform. He was used to being called *Charity* and looked down upon

by other boys. But now Noah had the luck to find Oliver—an orphan—whom even *he* could look down upon. Oh, what a beautiful thing human nature is! The same fine qualities can be found in both a great lord and a dirty charity-boy.

When Oliver had been at Mr. Sowerberry's a few weeks, the undertaker asked his wife a question. In a timid voice, he said, "I want to ask what you think, my dear. Young Twist is a very good-looking boy. There is a most interesting look of *sadness* about him. I think he could come to children's funerals. It might look nice, don't you think, dear?"

The next day Oliver went out to a funeral with Mr. Sowerberry. He didn't like it at all, but Mr. Sowerberry told him that, in time, he would get used to such sad affairs.

2 Off to London

Noah Claypole, of course, did not like to see Oliver in this new position of importance. So, in the next few months, Noah made sure to treat Oliver as badly as possible. Charlotte, the maid, treated him badly because Noah did. And Mrs. Sowerberry was Oliver's enemy because Mr. Sowerberry was friendly to him.

One evening, Noah and Oliver were waiting for their dinner. Noah was bored. He decided to pass the time by tormenting Oliver. "How's your mother, *Workhouse*?" he began.

"She's dead!" cried Oliver. "Don't you say anything about her to me!"

"I feel very sorry for you, *Workhouse*," said Noah in a harsh, nasty voice. "But you must know— they say your mother was a real bad one."

"What did you say?" Oliver sputtered.

"A real bad one," Noah repeated. "And it's better

she died when she did. Or she would surely have ended up in prison—or been hanged."

Red with fury, Oliver jumped up, knocking over his chair. He grabbed Noah by the throat and shook him until the boy's teeth chattered in his head. Then, as hard as he could, Oliver struck out and knocked Noah Claypole to the floor.

A minute before, Oliver had been the sad, quiet boy that cruel treatment had made him. But now his eyes were bright and he stood up tall.

"*Help! He'll murder me!*" cried Noah. "Come here, Charlotte! Oliver's gone mad!"

Charlotte rushed in, grabbed Oliver, and beat him with her fists. "Oh, you awful little murderer!" she cried. Mrs. Sowerberry helped by scratching Oliver's face. Noah got up and hit him from behind.

When Mr. Sowerberry came home, he was told of Oliver's terrible attack. That night he gave Oliver a good beating indeed.

Oliver took it all without a tear. He refused to cry in front of them. But later that night, when he was alone, he hid his face in his hands and wept for a very long time.

Oliver made up his mind. He tied up his few bits of clothes in a handkerchief and waited for

dawn. At first light, he walked quietly out of the house and started off on the road to London.

Oliver saw a sign that said it was 70 miles to London. It took him a week to get there. One day a kind man gave him some bread and cheese. Another day a kind old lady gave him her table scraps. If not for the help of these two people, Oliver would have died on the highway.

On the seventh morning, Oliver limped slowly into Barnet, a little town near London. He sat, with bleeding feet and dusty clothes, on a cold doorstep. He was too tired to even beg.

Soon he noticed that someone was watching him from the other side of the street. It was the strangest-looking boy Oliver had ever seen. He was short, bowlegged, and had small, sharp, ugly eyes. His hat sat on his head so lightly that it seemed ready to fall off. He wore a man's coat, which came nearly to his heels.

The boy crossed the street and called out cheerily, "Hello! What's the row?" Oliver could see that they were both about the same age.

"I am very hungry and tired," said Oliver, trying to hold back his tears.

"You want grub? Then you shall have it, mate!

It happens that I'm at a low-water mark myself—but I'll fork out this time. Come on!"

The boy treated Oliver to some bits of bread and ham. As they ate, they talked. The sharp-eyed boy soon found out that Oliver was going to London but had no place to stay there.

"Don't fret your eyelids on that score," the boy said. "I'm going to London tonight. I know a jolly gentleman there. He will give you lodgings for nothing—if *I* introduce you, that is."

This offer of a place to sleep was too tempting to pass up. As they walked down the road, Oliver found that the young man's name was Jack Dawkins, but his friends called him the Artful Dodger. Oliver got the idea that his new friend might not be quite respectable. But he still wanted to meet the jolly old gentleman.

The boys got to London at about 11:00 that night. The Dodger led Oliver up one street and down another. Oliver hurried to keep up, thinking that he had never seen a dirtier place. Even the air was dirty! Oliver choked on the filthy odors.

Finally, the Dodger opened a door and whistled a signal. He led Oliver up a dark and broken staircase to a room in the back. The ceiling was

black with age and smoke. A candle, stuck into a beer bottle, burned on the table. Standing over the fire, frying some sausages, was a shriveled old man. His evil-looking face was surrounded by a mass of matted red hair. On the floor, several beds made of old sacks were placed side by side.

Around the table were four or five boys, all about the same age as Oliver and the Dodger. Oliver was shocked. They were smoking pipes and drinking—as if they were middle-aged men!

"This is him, Fagin," said the Dodger. "My friend, Oliver Twist."

The old man grinned and bowed. The other boys gathered around Oliver, kindly putting away his cap and the clothes he was carrying, and emptying his pockets.

They all ate supper. After that, Fagin gave Oliver something to drink. Soon after, Oliver felt himself being lifted onto one of the sack beds. Soon the weary boy fell into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, no one was in the room but Fagin. He was admiring a sparkling gold watch, then more watches, rings, bracelets, and all sorts of fine jewels! Oliver noticed that the man had taken them from a box hidden under a board in the floor.

Suddenly Fagin saw that Oliver was awake. He slammed the lid back on the box. “How long have you been watching me, boy? Speak up!”

“I just woke up, sir. I couldn’t sleep anymore. I’m sorry if I bothered you.”

Fagin’s manner changed completely. “Tush, tush, my dear!” he cooed. “Of course not. These things are my little treasures, Oliver. Some people call me a miser. But these things are all I have to live on in my old age.”

Oliver thought that indeed Fagin must be a miser. Otherwise, why would he live in such a wretched place when he had all those fine watches? It must cost him a good deal of money to take care of the Dodger and the other boys.

Soon the Dodger came back in the door with one of the other boys, Charley Bates. The four sat down to eat breakfast. After that, the boys played a strange game with Fagin. The old man would walk about the room. The two boys would follow him around and bump into him accidentally. Then they would quickly take Fagin’s handkerchief, watch, watch chain, and even his glasses case from his pockets. If Fagin felt their hands, he would say so, and the game would start over.

While they were playing this game, a young woman named Nancy came to see Fagin. Her hair and clothes were not very neat. She was not exactly pretty, but she had a lively way about her and cheerful rosy cheeks. Oliver thought she seemed like a very nice girl. After a long visit, everyone had something to drink. Then Nancy, Charley Bates, and the Dodger went out to work.

Oliver had no idea what kind of work they did—but he was eager to learn. And sure enough, after a few days, Fagin sent Oliver out with the Dodger and Charley Bates.

3 Oliver Meets Mr. Brownlow

As the three boys walked along the streets, Oliver wondered where they might be going. Then, the Dodger made a sudden stop.

"See that old gentleman looking at books over there?" he whispered.

"*Perfect!*" said Charley Bates. The two boys walked across the road, leaving Oliver on the other side. As Oliver watched, the Dodger put his hand into the old gentleman's pocket and drew out a fine silk handkerchief! Then he gave the handkerchief to Charley, and the two boys ran off at full speed.

In an instant, the mystery of Fagin's hidden watches and jewels became clear in the boy's mind. For a moment he stood frozen in terror. Then, confused and frightened, he ran. But at just that moment, the old gentleman noticed that his handkerchief was missing. Seeing Oliver running away, he shouted, "Stop, thief!"

As soon as the Dodger and Charley Bates heard the shouts, they came back and joined the chase. Several people who had been walking down the street ran after him, too. Soon the terrified boy was caught and brought to the police station. The old gentleman went along with them.

After many questions and a long wait in a dirty cell, Oliver was pale and tired. The old gentleman, whose name was Mr. Brownlow, was sworn in. He testified that he wasn't really sure that Oliver was the thief. Just then, the bookseller rushed in.

"I saw it all," he said. "The robbery was done by another boy! This boy here seemed shocked at what was happening. I saw him run away."

"Let the boy go," said the judge, and Oliver was released. Feeling sick and weak, he fell down in the street. Mr. Brownlow found him there as he left the police station. Oliver's face was a deadly white, and his whole body was trembling.

"Poor boy, poor boy!" cried Mr. Brownlow, bending over him. "Call a coach, somebody! Hurry!"

Soon Oliver and Mr. Brownlow were in a coach, rattling off to another part of the city. Finally, the coach stopped before a neat house on a shady street. Oliver was gently carried to a bed. There,

he was treated with more kindness than he had ever known. But for many days, he was not even aware of it. Burning with a high fever, he drifted in and out of consciousness.

Finally he awoke and mumbled, “Where am I?”

Mrs. Bedwin, the housekeeper, rose from a chair. She was a motherly old lady, neatly dressed. “Hush, my dear,” she said. “You’ve been ill. Be quiet now, or you will make yourself sick again.” Then she gently smoothed back his hair and Oliver fell back asleep.

In three days’ time, Oliver was able to sit in a chair, propped up by pillows. He was even able to eat some broth. When Oliver tasted the rich broth, he guessed it would be strong enough to feed 350 workhouse boys—if enough water was added to it.

As Oliver ate, Mr. Brownlow came in. Tears came to his eyes as he saw the boy looking so much better. If the truth be told, Mr. Brownlow’s heart was big enough for any six ordinary gentlemen.

Suddenly the old man looked startled. “Look here, Mrs. Bedwin!” He pointed to the picture on the wall above Oliver’s head and then to the boy’s face. *The picture was Oliver’s living copy.* The eyes, the head, the mouth—every feature was the same!

* * *



While Oliver was being held at the police station, the Dodger and Charley Bates had run back to Fagin's. When Fagin heard about what had happened, his wrinkled old face creased with rage.

"So what's become of the boy?" Fagin cried, seizing the Dodger by the collar.

"Why, the traps have got him, that's all there is to tell!" the Dodger cried angrily. "Come, let go of me, will you!" To get free of Fagin's grasp, he swung himself out of his big coat. Then he grabbed a fork, and made a pass at Fagin's stomach.

Fagin jumped back very quickly for a man of his

age. He threw a pot at the Dodger.

"Why, what the blazes is in the wind now?" a deep voice boomed out. "Who threw that pot at me?" The man who growled these words was a stocky fellow of about 35. He wore a black coat, very dirty pants, and a grimy handkerchief around his neck. He had two days' growth of thick black beard and two scowling eyes, one of which was black and blue. An ugly white dog, its face scratched in 20 places, followed him into the room.

"Well, well, Bill Sikes," said Fagin. "We were just talking about our unlucky young friend, Oliver. He's been nabbed by the police. I'm afraid that he may say something that will get us into trouble."

"I'd say that's very likely," Sikes agreed. "You must get hold of him somehow."

Everyone in the room thought this would be very difficult, however. They all thought Oliver was still at the police station—and none of them wanted to go *there* for any reason.

* * *

Over the next week, Oliver continued to regain his health at Mr. Brownlow's. Finally, he was feeling well enough to get up. It was then he found that Mr. Brownlow had bought him a fine new suit, a

new cap, and a sturdy pair of new shoes.

One day soon after, Mr. Brownlow needed to have some books returned to the bookseller. Oliver was asked to take the books, along with some money, on the simple errand. He was happy to be able to do something to repay Mr. Brownlow's kindness. So off he went.

A visitor at Mr. Brownlow's asked if Oliver wasn't the boy who had been arrested as a thief. Mr. Brownlow explained that there had been a misunderstanding. Laughing, the other man made a bet with Mr. Brownlow. He wagered that Oliver would never return.

"The boy has a new suit of clothes on his back. He has a set of valuable books under his arm, and he has money in his pocket. Don't be such a fool, Brownlow! He'll join his old friends, the thieves, and all of them will laugh at you. If ever that boy returns to this house, sir, I'll eat my hat," he said.

Mr. Brownlow took out his pocket watch. "He'll be back in 20 minutes, at the most," he said.

Finally, it grew so dark that the numbers on the watch were hard to make out. But for hours the two old gentlemen continued to sit, in stony silence, with the watch ticking between them.

4 The Boy Is Kidnapped

Oliver set out for the bookseller's from Mr. Brownlow's house. When he was almost there, he accidentally turned down the wrong side street. Suddenly a young woman's voice screamed out, "Oh, my dear brother!" Oliver was stopped short by a pair of arms thrown round his neck.

"*Don't!*" cried Oliver, struggling. "Let go of me. Why are you stopping me?"

"Thank heaven, I've found you! Oh, Oliver! You naughty boy, to make me worry so much. Come home, dear, come!"

Oliver twisted around to look at her. "Why, it's *Nancy*!" he exclaimed in amazement.

"You see how he knows me!" cried Nancy, looking around at the other people on the street. "Make him come home, or he'll break the hearts of his dear mother and father!"

Then Bill Sikes rushed up to them. "Come home

to your poor mother, Oliver!" he cried.

Oliver gasped. "I don't belong to these people. I don't even know them. Help! Help!" he cried, struggling to escape.

Bill Sikes scowled. "Oh, I'll *help* you, all right. Come here, you young rascal! What books are these? You've been stealing again, have you? Give them here!" He grabbed the books and struck Oliver on the head.

"That's what he needs!" cried an onlooker. "It's the only way to teach him."

"The boy needs punishment!" cried two women.

"Come on, now, Oliver," said Bill Sikes. "Here, Bull's-eye—mind him, boy." Bill Sikes's mistreated white dog started growling at Oliver. Still weak from his recent illness and terrified by the dog, Oliver could not resist. No one on the street would come to his aid. The next moment, he was being dragged through narrow alleys by Bill Sikes and Nancy. Before long they arrived at Fagin's.

"Delighted to see you looking so well," said Fagin when he saw Oliver. "The Dodger will give you another suit, my dear, so you won't spoil that Sunday one. We've missed you, my dear! Why didn't you write and say you were coming?"

Charley Bates laughed loudly at this. The Dodger quickly went through Oliver's pockets and took Mr. Brownlow's money.

Then Oliver jumped up and tore wildly from the room, yelling for help. The Dodger and Charley Bates ran after him.

"Keep back the dog, Bill," cried Nancy. "Old Bull's-eye won't tear that boy apart—not unless you kill me first!"

Sikes shoved Nancy away from him just as the boys came back with Oliver. Fagin picked up a club and hit Oliver on the shoulders. Nancy rushed up and pulled the club away from the scowling old man. She flung it into the fire and screamed, "You've got the boy! What more do you want? He'll soon be a liar and a thief—just like me!"

Fagin backed away. "Well," he said with a sour smile, "after all, Nancy, it's your *living*, isn't it?"

Nancy screamed, "It *is* my living, and the cold, wet, dirty streets are my home. And you're the wretch who drove me to there long ago. And you're the one who'll keep me there, day and night, until I die!" Furiously, she made a mad rush at Fagin, but Bill held her back. Once more she tried to get loose, but then she fainted.

"She's all right now," said Sikes, roughly laying Nancy down in a corner. "She's a very strong girl when she gets this way."

Charley Bates took Oliver's new suit and gave him some old rags to wear. Then he locked him in a dark room. Oliver was feeling tired and sick again. Even in his misery, he quickly fell asleep.

For days and days, Oliver was kept locked indoors, alone. After about a week, the Dodger and Charley Bates began to visit him. By that time, the poor boy was glad to see a face—*any* face.

From that day on, Oliver was seldom left alone. He and the two boys played the old game with Fagin. At other times, the old man told stories of long-ago robberies. Some of the stories were so funny that Oliver could not help but laugh.

Fagin was a wise old crook, indeed. He had prepared Oliver's mind to prefer *any* company to being alone. Now he was slowly poisoning the poor boy's soul. Soon, Fagin hoped, Oliver Twist would be changed forever.

5 A Terrible Job

It was a chill, damp, windy night when Fagin went out to visit Bill Sikes. He and Sikes were busily planning to rob a house in Chertsey.

"Such silver is there, my dear, such silver!" said Fagin, rubbing his hands together.

Sikes was going to do the job with another robber, Toby Crackit. Toby had been hanging about the fine house for two weeks. But he had not been able to get any of the servants to join in their plot. "The old lady has employed some of them for 20 years. If you were to give them 500 pounds, they wouldn't be in on it," Sikes complained.

How could they get in without a servant's help? Someone would have to sneak in the house through a small window. Toby and Sikes had already tested the doors and shutters of the house. There was only one small window. Luckily, it was left open at night so the dog could get in and out.

The robbers would need a small child to go in the window and open the front door for them.

"Oliver is the boy for you," said Fagin. "He's been in training these last few weeks. It's time he began to work for his bread. Besides, the other boys are all too big."

Sikes frowned. "What makes you take such trouble with that brat?" he grumbled. "There are 50 other boys out in the street. You might pick and choose from any of them!"

"Because they're of no use to me, my dear," said Fagin. "Their *looks* convict them when they get into trouble. With this boy, I could do what I couldn't with 20 of them! And I'll have more power over him once he's done a robbery. That's all I want. Now, when is the job to be done?"

"Night after tomorrow."

"Good," said Fagin. "There's no moon."

It was decided that Oliver would go with Nancy more willingly than with anyone else. So she was chosen to take Oliver to Sikes. The next night, Nancy walked out Fagin's door holding Oliver's hand tightly. Oliver thought about calling for help, for many people were still in the streets.

But it was as if Nancy could read his thoughts.

"You can't help yourself," she said. "If you are ever to get loose from here, this is not the time. I have promised that you'd be silent. If you are not, you'll be hurt—and so will I. It could even mean my death. See here! This is what I got for sticking up for you."

She showed him some reddish bruises on her neck and arms. "*Remember this, Oliver!* And don't let me suffer more for you. If I could help you, I would—but I cannot. Just remember one thing: whatever they make you do, it's no fault of yours."

When they reached Bill Sikes's, the man loaded his gun in front of Oliver. Then he touched the cold metal to the boy's head. "If you speak a word when we're out there," he threatened, "you'd better say your prayers first."

It was a cheerless morning when Bill Sikes and Oliver set out. The boy had no idea where they were going, or what would happen. He didn't dare to ask. The trip was a long one. Except for a ride in a cart, they walked all the way. It was dark night when they reached the place where Toby Crackit was staying—a ruined, decayed house by the river. After the men had a nap, they set out, taking Oliver with them. By then it was half past one in the morning, intensely dark, foggy, and very cold.

The church bell struck two as they reached Chertsey. They walked to a grand house with a wall around it. It stood a little apart from the rest. Before Oliver had time to look around, Sikes caught him under the arms. Three or four seconds later, Oliver and Toby were lying in the grass on the other side of the wall. Sikes followed directly. Then they crept slowly toward the house.

Now, for the first time, Oliver could see what the men had on their minds. It was robbery—perhaps even murder! He sank to his knees, full of fear and horror.

"Get up," muttered Sikes, taking his gun from his pocket. "Get up, boy, or I'll blow your brains all over the grass!"

"Let me go!" cried Oliver. "Let me run away! I promise, I'll never come near London again!"

Toby grabbed the gun from Bill Sikes. Then, putting his hand tightly over Oliver's mouth, Toby dragged him to the house.

"Cut it out, Bill!" cried Toby. "You can't shoot him here. But hear me, boy. Say one more word, and I'll crack you on the head. Bill, get the shutter open. The boy will be all right."

In a minute they had the window open. Sikes

whispered to Oliver, "Now listen. Take this lantern. When I put you through this window, go up the steps and along the hall to the street door. Then open the door and let us in."

Sikes pushed Oliver through the window. The boy looked back and saw the gun pointing at him. "*Now!*" Sikes hissed.

Oliver decided he would run up the stairs and warn the family. He started walking slowly. Then Sikes yelled in alarm, "Come back! Back! *Back!*"

Oliver's lantern fell to the floor. He saw a light and two frightened-looking men at the top of the stairs. Then there was a bright flash followed by a loud noise and smoke. Oliver fell back to the window. Sikes grabbed him by the collar and pulled him out.

"*They've hit him!*" cried Sikes. "Quick! See how the boy bleeds!"

A bell rang loudly. Oliver heard men shouting and guns shooting. For a minute, he felt himself being carried over uneven ground at a rapid pace. Then a deadly cold feeling gripped the boy's heart, and he saw and heard no more.

6 Old Sally's Story

It was bitter cold—a night for the fortunate well-fed to draw close to the fire and be thankful they were at home. For the homeless, it was a night to lie down and die.

The matron at the workhouse where Oliver had been sent was just having tea. She had been alone these past 25 years—ever since Mr. Corney had died. She heard a knock on the door. It was Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle. Shyly, Mrs. Corney asked Mr. Bumble if he would like to stay for tea.

Mr. Bumble said yes, indeed, he would be delighted to stay for tea. Then he gave Mrs. Corney a look that made her face turn pink.

"Do you take it sweet, Mr. Bumble?"

"Very sweet, indeed," said Mr. Bumble, fixing his eyes on her. And if ever a beadle was capable of looking tender, Mr. Bumble did just then.

They sat down at a round table by the fire. As

they talked, Mr. Bumble kept moving his chair closer and closer to Mrs. Corney. He drank the last of his tea and finished a piece of toast. Then he wiped his lips and kissed her.

"Mr. Bumble!" cried Mrs. Corney in a whisper. "I shall scream!" Mr. Bumble said nothing. Instead, he put his arms around her.

Just then there was a knock at the door. It was a poor woman from the workhouse.

"If you please, mistress," she apologized. "Old Sally is a-going fast. She says she has something important to tell you before she dies."

Mrs. Corney was very angry. She got up and muttered something about old women who couldn't even *die* without bothering their betters! As Mrs. Corney followed the wretched woman outside, she scolded her all the way.

Left to himself, Mr. Bumble acted very strangely. He opened a drawer and counted the silverware. He inspected a silver milk pot, checking to see if it was really silver. Then he put on his hat and danced around the table four times.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Corney sat by old Sally's bed. "Now listen to me," said the dying woman. "It's my last chance to confess! In this very bed," Sally said,

"I once nursed a pretty young woman. She gave birth to a boy and died. The thing is that I-I robbed her. She wasn't even cold when I stole it! It was gold, I tell you!—*rich* gold, that might have been used to save her life!"

"*Gold!*" cried Mrs. Corney greedily, bending nearer the dying woman's face. "Go on!"

"The poor girl trusted me, and I stole from her—and from her baby. In my heart I stole her treasure when she first showed it to me. It was hanging round her neck. They would have treated her baby better, if they had known. Oh, if someone would only help that poor child!"

"The boy's name?" Mrs. Corney demanded.

"They called him Oliver," old Sally gasped. "The gold I stole was—"

"Yes, yes, *what*?" cried Mrs. Corney eagerly. Then suddenly she drew back. Old Sally had made a strange choking sound and then fallen back on the bed, lifeless.

* * *

Meanwhile, Fagin was growing very worried. When Toby had returned alone from the robbery, he had no idea of what had happened to Oliver or Sikes. Fagin had been out all evening, trying to find

out if anyone had news of Sikes. But no one knew a thing. Finally, he had turned his steps toward home. He was about to open his door when a dark figure approached him.

"*Fagin!*" whispered a voice close to his ear. "Where have you been?"

"On your business, my dear," said Fagin.

The man, whose name was Monks, came inside. They talked in whispers for some time. Fagin tried to calm him, but the fellow was very angry. Monks's voice rose as he said, "I tell you again it was badly planned. Why did you not get him into picking pockets, like the other boys? By now he would have been arrested, and sent safely out of the country!"

"Oliver was not like the other boys," Fagin explained. "It was not easy to train him to the business. But now, if he's dead . . ."

"It's no fault of mine if he is!" cried the other man. "Anything but his death, I told you from the start. I won't shed blood. Murder is always found out. And it haunts a man besides. What's that over there? The shadow of a woman?"

Fagin rushed out of the room and then came back. "It's nothing," he said. "No one's there."

"I know what I saw!" cried Monks. His body

trembled. Fagin looked at him with scorn. They both walked all around the place but found no one. Finally, Monks left.

* * *

Mrs. Corney hurried back to her room, where Mr. Bumble was still waiting. "Oh, Mr. Bumble!" she cried. "I have been so dreadfully put out!"

"Then you should take something, ma'am," said Mr. Bumble. "A little wine, perhaps?"

"Oh, no, I couldn't," said Mrs. Corney primly. "Oh, well—look on the top shelf in the right-hand corner."

Mr. Bumble quickly filled a cup.

After drinking half of it, Mrs. Corney simpered, "I'm better now."

Mr. Bumble tried some wine, too. Then they sat back in their chairs, which were pushed quite close together.

"This is a very comfortable room. The board gives you free coals, don't they, Mrs. Corney?" he asked, pressing her hand.

"And candles," said Mrs. Corney flirtatiously.

"Coals, candles, and a house rent-free," he said. "Oh, Mrs. Corney, what an angel you are!" Mrs. Corney sank into his arms.



"Did you know the master of the workhouse is worse tonight, my love?" asked Mr. Bumble. "Poor Mr. Slout can't live a week, the doctor says. And *I* shall take his place! Oh, Mrs. Corney, what luck for two hearts such as ours! One little word from you, Mrs. Corney, and everything would be perfect. Will you say that one little, little word?"

"Ye-ye-yes!" Mrs. Corney sighed contentedly.

After a long and loving hug with his future wife, Mr. Bumble went out into the cold again. This time he went to Mr. Sowerberry's to order a coffin for old Sally.

7 Oliver's Recovery

Bill Sykes was carrying the wounded Oliver away from the house at Chertsey. Two men and some dogs were following close behind.

"It's all up, Bill," cried Toby Crackit, gasping for want of breath. "Drop the kid, and let's show them our heels." At this shrewd advice, Sikes laid the boy in a dry ditch and started to run.

The two men and the dogs continued to chase after the robbers. It was a very cold night, however, and the men were more than a little afraid. A short time later, they gave up and went back home.

As dawn broke, the weather grew even colder. The mist rolled along the ground like a dense cloud of smoke. The grass was wet, and the wind blew with a hollow moan. Yet, still, Oliver lay where Sikes had left him.

Finally, as morning brought a hard rain, Oliver awoke. He was in pain. His left arm hung heavy and

useless at his side. He was so weak that he could barely sit up. Finally, though, he managed to stand and make his way to the road. He spotted a house not far away. As he came closer, he saw it was the same house they had tried to rob!

Oliver was in terrible pain. He had no choice but to knock on the door. A servant, Mr. Giles, opened it and gasped. "Here he is! It's one of the thieves, ma'am! It's the one I shot!"

A sweet female voice spoke next. "Wait here, while I speak to Aunt." Moments later, the young woman returned and said that the boy was to be carried up to Mr. Giles's room. Then she sent another servant to get a doctor. "Poor little fellow," she said, noticing Oliver's small size. "Treat him kindly, Giles—for my sake." Giles was gentle indeed, and soon Oliver was resting upstairs.

The doctor, a fat, good-humored gentleman, soon arrived. While he was looking at Oliver, two women waited. One of them was Mrs. Maylie, a small old woman who was dressed neatly in old-fashioned clothing. The other was Rose, a lovely girl about 17 years old. She was so sweet and lovely, the earth seemed too harsh and rough for her. A thousand lights played about her face.

Soon Dr. Losberne came down the stairs to make his report. "He is quiet and comfortable now," he said. "I think you ladies should come up and see him."

The two women looked into the room where Oliver was resting. Instead of seeing the rough-faced thief they had expected, they saw a mere child worn with pain and exhaustion. His wounded arm was crossed upon his chest. His head rested on the other arm. The boy stirred and smiled in his sleep. "What can this mean?" cried the older lady. "This poor child cannot be a robber!"

"Evil," said the doctor sternly, "comes in many forms."

Rose frowned and said, "Even if he *has* been wicked—think how *young* he is! He may never have known a mother's love. He may have been treated badly. Aunt, think of this before you let them drag this sick child to a prison. If not for you, I might have been as helpless as this poor child. Have pity on him before it is too late!"

"My dear love!" cried the older lady, taking Rose in her arms. "Do you think I would harm a hair on this boy's head? Tell me—what can I do to save him from prison, Doctor?"

Dr. Losberne thought for a few minutes. At last he said, “If you allow me to bully Giles, I think I can manage it. I don’t like to do it, for he is a good servant. But you can make it up to him later on.”

Rose and Mrs. Maylie agreed to the doctor’s plan. Dr. Losberne went downstairs and had a long talk with Giles. Eventually Giles became very confused. He was no longer sure that it was Oliver who had come to rob the house. By the time two policemen came, Giles was not even sure that he had shot anyone. The police went away thinking Oliver had been shot in an accident. They decided he was not one of the robbers at all.

After the police left, Oliver tried to tell the doctor and the two women his story. He had to stop often because of pain and lack of strength. Yet finally, in a weak voice, he told them how he had been treated during his short life. The women felt very sorry for the unlucky boy.

Oliver’s pillow was smoothed by gentle hands that night. His sleep was peaceful and happy.

But Oliver’s problems were neither slight nor few. In addition to the broken arm, he had a high fever. This had been caused by the wet and cold to which he had been exposed the night before.

Slowly, over the next few weeks, Oliver grew stronger.

One day, at his request, Oliver was taken by Dr. Losberne to Mr. Brownlow's house. But now the white house had a *For Rent* sign in the window. After making inquiries, Dr. Losberne learned that Mr. Brownlow had gone on a trip to the West Indies. He had left six weeks before.

Oliver was terribly disappointed. How he had longed to see the old gentleman again! He wanted to tell him what happened the day he disappeared. The idea of clearing his name with Mr. Brownlow had been on his mind for some time. The thought that Mr. Brownlow should think him a robber was almost more than he could bear.

About two weeks later, when Oliver was well enough, the women took him to a country cottage. It was a lovely spot. The little boy, whose days had been spent in crowded, dirty streets, seemed to come alive in this magical place. Here roses and honeysuckle grew around the cottage door. Ivy crept around the trunks of the trees. The garden flowers filled the air with delicious odors.

It was a happy time. The boy's days were

peaceful and calm. Every morning a white-headed old gentleman, who lived near the church, taught him lessons. Oliver learned to read better and to write well. After his daily lessons, he would walk with Mrs. Maylie and Rose. The women would talk to him of books, or Rose would read aloud for them. In the evening, the young lady would sit down to the piano and sing. On Sundays, they would visit the friendly, clean houses of the working people. At night, Oliver would read a chapter or two of the Bible aloud to Rose and Mrs. Maylie.

In this way, three lovely, happy months went by. Oliver grew very close to the kind women who had saved him, and they to him.

8 Rose and Harry

Spring flew by, and summer came. The village was in the full glow of its richness. The trees burst out into strong green life, and flowers grew everywhere. It was the prime of the year. All things in nature were glad and flourishing.

One beautiful night, however, Rose became very ill. Her skin had become as cold as marble. She had lost none of her beauty, but she was changed. First her face had suddenly become red. Then this disappeared, and she was once more deathly pale.

The next morning, Mrs. Maylie sent Oliver to the village with a letter for Dr. Losberne. She almost gave him a letter for her son, Harry, too—but then she changed her mind. "If Rose is no better, I will send this letter to Harry tomorrow," she said.

By the time Oliver got back from the village, Rose had grown much worse. By midnight, she was delirious. The village doctor who examined her said

the illness was very alarming. "It will be a miracle if she recovers," he said to Mrs. Maylie.

Dr. Losberne finally arrived late that night. He stayed in the sickroom a long time. When he came out, he turned away. "It is hard," he said. "She is so young. So loved. There is very little hope."

The next morning, Oliver crept away to the old churchyard. He sat down on one of the green mounds, crying silently and praying for Rose. All around him, every leaf and flower of summer was in full bloom. How could this be a time for death? Rose could surely not die when the whole earth was bursting with life!

When Oliver returned to the cottage, he learned that Rose had fallen into a deep sleep. The doctor said that she would wake—either to life, or to bid them farewell and die.

For hours, Oliver and Mrs. Maylie sat, listening, and afraid to speak. At last Dr. Losberne stepped out of Rose's room.

"What of our dearest Rose?" cried Mrs. Maylie. "Tell me at once."

"Be calm, my dear lady," the doctor said as a look of great relief and happiness spread over his face. "The danger is over at last. Our dear Rose will

live to bless us all for many years to come."

Poor old Mrs. Maylie! Her slight energy had supported her for many long days. Yet now it left her all at once, and she sank into the friendly arms of Dr. Losberne and Oliver.

That night, Harry Maylie arrived. He was a handsome young man of about 25. His meeting with his mother was full of warm emotion on both sides.

"Oh, Mother," he whispered softly, "why didn't you write and send for me sooner? You know how I feel about Rose!"

"You feel this way *now*, Harry," said Mrs. Maylie.

"And forever! My heart is set on Rose as firmly as ever the heart of a man was set on a woman. I have no thought of life beyond her," said Harry.

"Harry," said Mrs. Maylie, "you are young. You have great plans for yourself. You know that you will probably be a member of Parliament before Christmas. Before you risk your all, think for a few moments on Rose's history. You must remember she has a stain on her name. She has never known who her parents are. If you were to marry Rose, you might regret it some day. And dear Rose does not deserve such regret."

"I could *never* regret it, Mother! I have loved

her for years. Will you tell Rose I am here? Tell her how I long to see her."

"Of course," said Mrs. Maylie. "You may speak to her when she is well enough."

Some days later, when Rose was finally able to leave her room, Harry saw her alone. "A few—a very few words will be enough, Rose," he said. "I was brought here by the most dreadful of all fears. They told me you were dying, fluttering between life and death! I was so afraid you might die and never know how much I loved you. I couldn't bear that thought. For *years* I have loved you! I was trying hard to win my way to fame. Then I could come proudly home to tell you it had all been won for *you*! But here and now—with no fame won—I offer you my heart. I stake my all upon the words with which you greet the offer."

Rose was very pale. "You have always been kind and noble," she said. "But there is a blot upon my name. If not for dear Mrs. Maylie, who has raised me as if I were her own child, I would be alone in this world. I have no real name, no family. Dear Harry, I would be like a great stone around your neck! I would hold you back from rising up in the world. So now I ask you to forget me. Not as a



friend—for that would hurt me too deeply—but as someone to love."

"Dearest Rose!" cried Harry. "What if *I* had been poor, sick, and helpless? Would you have turned from me then? Or is it my chance to rise to riches and honor that makes you say 'no'?"

"The question does not arise, and never will," Rose said sadly. "It is unfair, almost unkind, of you to ask." She gave him her hand to kiss goodbye.

But Harry caught her to his chest. He gently placed one kiss on her beautiful forehead and then hurried from the room.

9 A Plain Gold Ring

Mr. Bumble had been married to the former Mrs. Corney for two months. Then one evening, they had an argument. At first Mrs. Bumble had tried to shame her husband into giving in by whimpering and crying. When that had no effect she had knocked him off his chair. Mr. Bumble left the house. The fight with his wife had made him thirsty, so he went to a public house.

A tall stranger was the only other customer. "I think I have seen you before. If I'm not mistaken, you were once a beadle. You *are* Mr. Bumble, are you not?" asked the stranger.

"I am," said Mr. Bumble, surprised and curious.

The stranger sat down next to Mr. Bumble. "I came here today to look for you," he said. "What luck that you walked into this very room at this moment! I need some information—and I'll pay you well for it. Do you remember a workhouse boy who

was apprenticed to an undertaker? A boy who later ran away to London?"

"Why, you mean *Oliver Twist*!" cried Mr. Bumble. "That young rascal . . ."

"It's not him I want to hear about. I've heard enough of him," said the stranger. "It's a woman I want to know about—the old gray-haired woman who took care of his mother."

Mr. Bumble told the stranger that old Sally had died. But, he said, his wife had heard a secret from her shortly before she passed away.

"Bring your wife to see me at nine o'clock tomorrow evening," the stranger said excitedly. He wrote down an address on a scrap of paper. "Ask for Monks."

The next night, Mr. and Mrs. Bumble went to the address Monks had given them. "Now," said Monks, as they sat down, "the sooner we come to our business, the better."

Mrs. Bumble eyed him greedily. "Ah, but the first question," she said slyly, "is how much the information is worth to you."

"Maybe 20 pounds," said Monks.

"Give me *25* pounds, and I'll tell you all—not a word before!" snapped Mrs. Bumble.

After some argument, Monks counted out 25 gold pounds onto the table. "Now, let's hear your story," he demanded.

"Old Sally told me she stole something from Oliver Twist's dead mother," Mrs. Bumble said. "Before Sally could say anything else, she died—without another word. But I found a pawn ticket in her apron pocket. This is what I got for it."

She threw a small leather bag on the table. Monks tore it open with trembling hands. It contained a small gold locket, which held two locks of hair and a gold wedding band.

"The name *Agnes* is engraved on the inside," said Mrs. Bumble. "There is a space left blank for the last name. You can see there is also a date—a year before the boy, Oliver Twist, was born."

Monks was satisfied. "Thank you for the information," he said. "I'll take the locket and its contents now. And if we meet again, we don't know each other. Do you understand?"

"You may count on it," Mr. Bumble assured him. Then he and Mrs. Bumble left quickly.

A few days later, Monks went to see Fagin. Nancy happened to be at Fagin's place on an errand for Bill Sikes. Monks frowned when he saw her. "I

need to talk to you *alone*," he said to Fagin.

"We'll be right back," Fagin told Nancy. Then he took Monks into another room. As soon as they left, however, Nancy slipped off her shoes, tiptoed after them, and listened at the door.

The next day, Bill Sikes noticed that Nancy was unusually pale. There was a strange fire in her eyes. "You look awful! What's wrong?" he asked.

"Nothing at all," said Nancy. "Why do you look at me so hard, Bill?"

"Get me a drink, girl," Bill grumbled, "and put on your *own* face—or I'll change it so much you won't know it!"

Nancy poured his drink while keeping her back to him. Bill was suspicious. But then he thought to himself, "She *wouldn't*—no! Why, there ain't a more loyal-hearted woman around, or I'd have cut her throat long ago."

She brought him the drink, and he drank it down. Soon he was in a deep, heavy sleep.

"The drug has taken effect," Nancy said to herself. "But I may be too late, even now."

She ran outside. In an hour, she was on a quiet street in a rich part of town. She knocked at the door of a family hotel.

"I need to see Miss Maylie, who is staying here," she said. The maid who had opened the door hesitated. Nancy's clothes were rumpled and dirty. Her hair was wild. But she finally let Nancy in and took her up to a small room. Soon Rose Maylie came in the door. "Yes, miss? I am the person you asked for," Rose said politely.

"Is-is- that door shut?" Nancy asked nervously.

"Yes," said Rose. "Why?"

"Because," said the girl, "I am about to put my life and the lives of others in your hands. I am the girl that dragged little Oliver back to Fagin's the night he left Mr. Brownlow's house."

"*You!*" Rose cried in amazement.

"I, lady," said Nancy. "Do you know a man named Monks?"

"No," said Rose.

"Well, he knows *you*," said the girl. "He also knows you are staying here. That is how I found you. Some time ago, I listened to him as he was talking to Fagin. Monks had seen Oliver with two of Fagin's boys the day he was taken to the police station. He struck a bargain with Fagin. If Fagin got the boy back, he would be paid. If Fagin made Oliver into a thief, he would be paid even more.

Then I saw no more of Monks—not until last night."

Here Nancy stopped and looked around uneasily, for the vision of Sikes haunted her always. Then she went on. "Last night Monks came again. I listened at the door. Monks said that he had thrown all proof of Oliver's identity into the bottom of the river. He said he could get all of Oliver's money now—but he'd rather have had it the other way. He wished he could have had Oliver jailed as a thief. But Monks swore he'd be watching Oliver for the rest of his life. He said, 'You've never seen such traps as I'll lay for my young brother, Oliver.'"

"His *brother*!" Rose exclaimed.

"Yes," said Nancy. "And now I must leave. I must get home before anyone thinks I have come on such an errand."

"Home!" cried Rose. "You must not go back to the companions you paint in such terrible colors! I beg you, my dear! Tell the gentleman in the next room your story. Then you can be taken to a place of safety within an hour."

"Lady," Nancy said mournfully, "if I had this chance years ago, I might have turned away from a life of sin and sorrow. But it is too late!"

"No!" Rose cried. "It is *never* too late!"

"It *is*," the girl said flatly. "I must go now."

"But where can I find you again when it is necessary?" Rose asked.

"Every Sunday night, from 11 until the clock strikes 12," said the girl, "I will walk on London Bridge—*if I am alive*." She moved toward the door.

"Won't you stay for another moment?" Rose pleaded. "Think about your life and the chance you have to escape it. What can keep you there?"

"There is no cure for a woman such as I, who has no friends," Nancy said sadly. "It is too late. I have let a dangerous man fill the place in my heart that has been a blank all my life."

Nancy turned to the door. "Bless you, sweet lady," she said. "May God send as much happiness on your head as I have brought shame on mine!" Then, sobbing, Nancy bolted out of the room and ran out to the street.

Rose spent a sleepless, anxious night. She knew she must tell someone what Nancy had told her. Harry Maylie seemed the best choice. When morning came, she sat down to write him a letter. She took up her pen 50 times, and laid it down again, without writing a single word.

Suddenly, Oliver came running into the room.

He seemed very excited. On a walk with Giles, he had seen Mr. Brownlow get out of a coach and enter a house! Giles had written down the address.

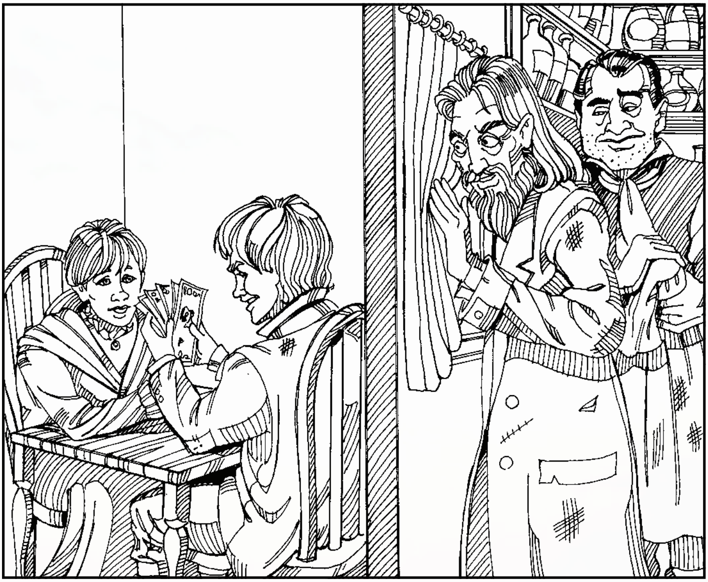
Right away, Rose sent for a coach, and she and Oliver drove to Mr. Brownlow's house. What a happy reunion it was! Mr. Brownlow was delighted to see Oliver again. And he was relieved to hear from Rose's lips that the boy was innocent of any wrongdoing. As for Mrs. Bedwin, the housekeeper—she had never doubted Oliver's goodness for a moment!

10 Fagin's Plan

On the very same night that Nancy met with Rose Maylie, two persons advanced toward London. They were none other than Noah Claypole and Charlotte, the Sowerberrys' maid. The two of them were in a great hurry—for they had with them 20 pounds that they had stolen from Mr. Sowerberry!

Charlotte was carrying the money. She thought it was because Noah trusted her with it. But it was not young Noah Claypole's habit to trust anybody. He had a quite different reason for insisting that Charlotte carry the money. If they were caught, the money would be found on *her*. Then he could loudly claim his innocence of any theft, and the police would have to let him go. Of course, he didn't tell Charlotte any of this.

When the two arrived in London, they stopped at a public house. By chance it was the very tavern where Fagin often went.



Noah and Charlotte sat in a back room just behind the bar. On the dark wall behind and above their table was a pane of glass hidden by a small curtain. This made it easy for the owner of the bar to observe anyone sitting at that table. Also, by putting his ear up against the thin wall, he could hear what was being said. As Charlotte and Noah were eating, Fagin came into the bar on business.

"Hush!" said the bartender to Fagin. "Strangers in the next room."

Fagin carefully opened the curtain a little and pressed his ear to the wall. Noah was saying,

"Taking 20 pounds from Mr. Sowerberry was all right. But there's more than that to be got in this world—especially here in London. There's plenty of pockets to pick and rich women's purses to snatch. There's mail coaches and banks to rob! I'd like to get in with a gang of proper-looking men. That would suit me—if there was good profit. Oh, Charlotte, if we could only come upon some gentlemen of this sort! It might cost us that 20-pound note you've got, but it would be worth it."

After Noah said this, he looked up and saw a stranger coming toward him. The stranger was Fagin. Noah was startled when the old man told him he had overheard what he'd just been saying. "I only heard you by chance, my dear," Fagin said. "You are very lucky it was only me."

Within minutes, Noah agreed to be in Fagin's gang, and the 20 pounds were in Fagin's pocket!

A few days later, Fagin had a job for Noah. He wanted Noah to follow Nancy and report back to him about where she went. Lately, Fagin had noticed that Nancy had been acting strangely. For example, on Sunday night just before 11:00, she had put on her bonnet to go out.

"Where are you going?" barked Bill Sikes.

"I don't know where," replied the girl.

"Then I do," said Sikes. "*Nowhere*. Sit down."

"I just want a breath of air," said Nancy.

"Put your head out of the window," said Sikes.

"There's not enough there," said the girl. "I want the air in the street. Tell him to let me go, Fagin. For only one hour."

Bill Sikes pulled Nancy's bonnet from her head and pushed her into a chair. He held her down by force. Fagin did nothing to help her. Nancy struggled and begged until it was past midnight. Then, tired and worn out, she gave up the fight. Bill told her not to make any more efforts to go out that night, and left her to recover. Then Bill rejoined Fagin.

"What do you suppose got into her?" asked Sikes. "I thought I had tamed her by now."

"I never saw her like this," said Fagin.

To himself, Fagin guessed that Nancy had grown tired of Bill Sikes. Perhaps she had found someone new. But he was too clever to tell Sikes what he had been thinking.

Perhaps, thought Fagin, Nancy could be talked into poisoning Sikes. Then Nancy would be free of him, and Fagin would be rid of him, too. This would

be good for Fagin. After all these years, Sikes knew too much about Fagin's business. And since Fagin would know of Nancy's crime, he would have more power over the girl than ever.

Fagin liked the idea. But first he had to find out the identity of Nancy's new friend. Then he could threaten the girl that he would tell Sikes that she had found someone new. Nancy would be afraid that Sikes would hurt the other man. That would make it easier to persuade her to poison Sikes—to protect herself and her new friend. In Fagin's eyes, the plan was perfect.

The next day, Fagin met with Noah Claypole, the newest member of his gang.

"I want you to follow Nancy," Fagin told Noah. "She's found some new friends, and I must know who they are. See where she goes and who she meets. Report everything you see—to me alone."

For six days and nights, Nancy went nowhere. Finally, on the seventh night, the door opened just before 11:00. Noah saw Nancy come out. He followed her as closely as seemed safe.

11 Nancy's Sad Fate

Near midnight, two people walked on London Bridge. One was Nancy, and the other was Noah Claypole, who was following her into the deepest shadows. Nancy stopped at the center of the bridge.

Soon a coach pulled up. Rose Maylie and Mr. Brownlow got out. Nancy hurried up to them. "Not here," she said. They followed her down some dark steps, where they would be hidden from sight. Creeping just behind, Noah quickly crouched under the cover of a shadow. He was well within hearing distance.

"We plan to capture Monks and make him confess the secret of Oliver's birth," Mr. Brownlow told Nancy. "If we cannot get Monks, you must deliver Fagin. Please trust us, my girl."

"No!" cried Nancy. "I will never do it! As bad as Fagin is, sir, *I've* led a bad life, too. You don't understand. I won't turn on them—any of them—

just as they haven't turned on me."

"Then help me find Monks," said Mr. Brownlow. "If he turns on the others, we shall not go after them. I promise you that they shall go free."

Nancy considered his words. "I have lived among liars all my life," she said. "But I will take your word." Then, in a voice so low that Noah could hardly hear, she told them where Monks was.

Mr. Brownlow smiled. "Now that you have so kindly helped us, let us help you," he said warmly. "We can offer you a safe place to live in England—or another country."

"I cannot, sir," cried Nancy. "I *hate* the life I've made—but I am chained to it. I must go now!"

Nancy ran off, crying bitterly. Shaking his head sadly, Mr. Brownlow led Rose away. As soon as everyone had gone, Noah Claypole ran for Fagin's house as fast as his legs would carry him.

Within a few hours, Fagin and Sikes knew everything. But they did not believe that Nancy had refused to turn them in. Sikes rushed to the door. "Wait!" cried Fagin. "You won't be—*too*—violent, will you, Bill? I mean, not too violent for our safety. Whatever you do—keep it quiet, won't you?"

Without a word, Bill rushed out into the streets.

He ran until he got to his own door.

Nancy was asleep. "Get up," Bill said, jarring her awake. At first she didn't know what was happening. Then, seeing the faint light of dawn out the window, the girl rose to open the curtain. "Leave it," Bill said. "There's light enough for what I've got to do."

He grabbed the girl by the head and throat and dragged her to the center of the room.

"Bill, *Bill!*" Nancy gasped as she tried to pull away. "Tell me what I've done!"

"As if you don't know, you she-devil!" Bill muttered through clenched teeth. "Every word you said on the bridge was heard!"

"Then spare my life, as I spared yours!" she cried. "Think of all I have given up tonight for you! I have been true to you, Bill. On my guilty soul I swear that I have!" She grabbed hold of him so tightly that he could not tear her away.

"Let me see those people again," she begged. "I will ask them to show you the kindness they showed me. Then we can *both* leave this dreadful place! Far away–and apart from each other—we could have a chance to find better lives. It's never too late! They told me so!"

Bill pulled one arm free from her grasp and

grabbed his gun. He knew that gunfire would draw attention. So, with all his might, he struck out at her twice with the heavy weapon. Nancy fell on her knees and raised her hands toward heaven. It was a ghastly thing to see! Bill staggered back, raising his hand to shut out the sight. Then he seized a heavy club and struck her down.

* * *

The dawning sun burst upon the city in clear glory. The golden rays lit up the room where the murdered woman lay. Sikes tried to shut out the light, but in spite of his efforts it streamed in through rips in the curtains. At last he got up, locked the room, and left the house.

He walked out into the country, with his dog following him. Up and down fields he went, resting in ditches, then walking over the same fields again. Where could he go to get some food? What place was near and not too public? *Hendon*, he thought. But when he got there, everyone seemed to look at him with suspicion. Morning and noon passed, and then the day was ending. Still he walked.

Nancy's ghastly, bludgeoned figure seemed to follow at his heels. At last, finding a shed in a field, he lay down inside it. But then a new horror came

upon him. Her eyes, so empty of light, were staring at him. He tried to look away—but Nancy's eyes seemed to be everywhere!

When morning came, Sikes decided to risk going back to London. "They'll never expect me to go back," he thought. When he got there, he'd force Fagin to give him money. Then he could leave for France or some other country.

* * *

It was late evening when Mr. Brownlow got out of a coach at his own door. Two strong-looking men climbed out, too. Then they helped a third man out of the coach, and led him into the house. This man was Monks.

"What right do you have to kidnap me on the street and bring me here?" barked Monks.

"Be quiet," Mr. Brownlow said in a stern voice. "If you try to leave, I shall call the law. I will have you arrested for fraud and robbery."

"This is fine treatment from my father's oldest friend," Monks complained.

"It is *because* I was your father's oldest friend that you are here, young man," said Mr. Brownlow.

After a long silence, Monks gave in. "What do you want with me?" he asked in a surly voice.

"First, I shall tell you everything I know," said Mr. Brownlow. "Then you shall see what I want. When your father was a mere boy, he was forced into marriage with a woman ten years older than he. After years of unhappiness, your father and his wife went their separate ways. They had just one child—*you*, Edward Leeford.

"As you know," Mr. Brownlow went on, "some 15 years ago, when your father was 31 and you were about 11, your father met new friends. He became acquainted with a retired naval officer who had two daughters. The first daughter was a beautiful girl of 19, and the other a mere child of two or three. In time, the older daughter fell deeply in love with your father, and he with her. Within a year, they were solemnly pledged to each other."

"I know nothing at all of all this," said Monks, biting his lips.

"Ah! But your manner tells me you have never forgotten it," Mr. Brownlow said.

"An uncle of your father's died in Rome. Your father had to go there right away—for the uncle had left him money. Before he left on the trip, however, he came to London. He left some things with me. One was a portrait he had painted of the girl he

loved. Then, soon after your father got to Rome, he became ill and died. I went looking for the girl, but she had disappeared."

Monks was now drawing his breath more freely and looking around with a smile.

"But quite by chance, your younger brother, Oliver, came my way," said Mr. Brownlow.

"*What?*" Monks cried out.

"I was able to rescue him from a life of crime," said Mr. Brownlow. "While he was with me, I was struck by his strong likeness to the girl in the portrait. Then the boy was lost to me. Since your mother was dead, I knew that only *you* could solve the mystery. The last I had heard, you were in the West Indies. So I went there to look for you, only to find that you had returned to London. Until two hours ago, however, I had no luck in finding you."

"And now what do you have against me?" Monks demanded boldly. "That some young boy *looked like* some girl's portrait? Ha! You don't even know if my father had another child!"

"I did not," said Mr. Brownlow, "but in the last two weeks I have learned it all. There was a will, but your mother destroyed it. There was also proof of Oliver's birth and of his parents. That proof was

destroyed by you. As you told Fagin, 'All proof of Oliver's identity lies at the bottom of the river.' "

"*No!*" cried Monks.

"I know every word that has passed between you and Fagin," Brownlow went on. "Now murder has been done—and *you* are partly to blame."

"No, no!" Monks wailed. "I thought Nancy and Sikes just had a foolish argument."

"The girl died because she told some of your secrets," Mr. Brownlow said in a mournful voice. "Will you tell the truth before witnesses now?"

"Yes, I will," Monks muttered.

"And you must also give Oliver what is owed to him," Mr. Brownlow added.

Then suddenly the door was unlocked. Dr. Losberne rushed in and cried out, "Bill Sikes will be taken—*tonight*! His dog has been seen nearby. Sikes himself is sure to show up soon!"

"What of Fagin?" asked Mr. Brownlow.

"He'll be arrested, too," said the doctor.

Mr. Brownlow turned to Monks. "Well? Have you made up your mind?"

"Yes. You—you will not turn me in?"

"I will not," said Mr. Brownlow. "Stay here. It is your only hope of safety."

12 The End of the Story

Two members of Fagin's gang, Tom and Toby, were hiding in a run-down house by the river. "It was awful when they caught Fagin," said Tom. "The crowd was all around him, snarling and trying to get at him. Old Fagin was muddy and bleeding and clinging to the police as if they were his dearest friends. I can still hear the women in the crowd screaming. They swore they'd tear his heart out!"

Some time later, Bill Sikes arrived. He was pale and out of breath. He looked like his own ghost. Charley Bates got to the hideout shortly after that. When Charley saw Bill Sikes, he fell back. "You *monster*!" he said. "I'll turn you in for what you did to Nancy! *Murderer!*"

With these cries, the boy threw himself on Bill Sikes. The boy and the man rolled on the ground, fighting. The other robbers stared at them, unable to move. Charley desperately held onto Sikes,

calling out for help as loudly as he could.

Lights gleamed below. There were voices and the clatter of many footsteps hurrying across the nearest wooden bridge.

"*Help!*" yelled Charley. "*He's in here!*"

The angry crowd answered with a terrible roar. A man on horseback shouted, "I'll give 20 pounds to the man who brings a ladder!" Hundreds of voices took up the cry.

Sikes decided to go up on the roof. He thought that was his one chance to escape. If he could drop down into the muddy ditch below, he might get lost in the crowd. He got a strong rope and hurried up to the roof.

The crowd grew larger and even wilder. People climbed to the tops of houses all around. The night rang out with their angry shouts and screams.

Sikes tied one end of the rope to the chimney. The other end he made into a noose and brought the loop over his head. He was about to bring it down around his waist when suddenly he looked around and screamed in terror, "*Her eyes!*"

Staggering as if struck by lightning, he lost his balance and fell off the roof. The noose was at his neck! His weight closed the noose as his body shot

down like an arrow. He fell 35 feet. The rope jerked tightly around his neck, and there he hung.

* * *

Two days after Bill Sikes's death, a pair of coaches drove to the town where Oliver was born. In one coach were Oliver, Rose, Mrs. Maylie, Mrs. Bedwin, and Dr. Losberne. In the other were Mr. Brownlow and Monks.

They all stayed in a fine hotel—a place that Oliver used to stare at in awe when he was a poor workhouse boy. There, in that hotel, Oliver was told the secrets of his birth. How shocked the boy was to meet Monks—and to learn that the man was his own half-brother!

While Oliver listened, Monks confessed to Mr. Brownlow that his mother had taken two letters from his father. The letters had been written by Edwin Leeford himself, just before he died. They were addressed to Mr. Brownlow. One letter was meant to be given to Agnes Fleming. In it, Edwin Leeford confessed that he had made up a story to explain why he could not marry her right away. He reminded her of the day he had given her the locket and the ring. He said that he hoped to engrave his name on the ring some day in the future.

The second letter was Leeford's will. It left little money to his wife and Monks—for both had given him much misery. Most of the money was left to Agnes and her child. If the child was a girl, the money would be given freely. But a boy must first prove himself. If he turned to wrongdoing, the money would go to Monks instead.

Monks confessed that he had paid Fagin to lead Oliver into a life of crime. He also admitted that his mother had burned the will and the letter. Finally, he said that he himself had destroyed the ring and the locket that the Bumbles gave him.

Then Mr. Brownlow brought in Mr. and Mrs. Bumble. Nervously blaming each other, they had no choice but to confess as well. Mr. Brownlow said he would make sure they both lost their jobs as punishment for the evil they had done.

Oliver's tears had fallen fast as he listened to the secrets of his mother and father. But his heartache changed to joy when one last secret came to light: *Agnes had a younger sister—Rose*. Oliver's beloved Rose was his own true aunt!

The boy threw his arms around her. "I'll never call you aunt," he cried. "*Sister!* You are my own dear sister. My heart has loved you dearly from the first!"



The orphan children had found each other. The others left them alone for a while. Then came a soft knock at the door. When Harry Maylie came in, Oliver excused himself.

"I have given up all my former dreams of riches and glory," Harry said to Rose. "Now England's rich countryside and a village church—my own—would make me prouder than all the hopes I had before. This is the life I offer you, and my heart as well." Soon Oliver and the others were giving their good wishes to the joyful bride- and groom-to-be.

* * *

At last the jury in Fagin's trial returned. There was perfect silence in the court. Then the single word: *Guilty*. The courtroom rang with a great cheer, and then another and another. Within minutes, the crowd outside shouted joyfully upon hearing the news that Fagin would die on Monday.

He was taken to a cell and left alone. The old man sat on a stone bench opposite the door and remembered what the judge had said. He thought of other men he had seen hanged—strong and vigorous men who were turned into dangling heaps of limp clothing!

By dawn on Monday, a great crowd had already gathered at the prison. The people in the crowd played cards, laughed, and joked. Everyone seemed brimming with life. But there, in the middle of the crowd, was the scaffold and the hanging rope—the terrible workings of death.

* * *

There is little more of this story. It shall be told in few and simple words.

In three months, Rose and Harry were married. Harry became the pastor of the village church. Mrs. Maylie lived out the rest of her days with her son and his wife. Rose grew into sweet and lovely

womanhood. In the years that followed, her own happy children were always at her knee.

Oliver gave some of his father's money to Monks. But sadly, Monks fell back into his old ways, spent it all, and died in prison.

In return for telling the police all he knew about Fagin, Noah Claypole was set free. He and Charlotte now make a living without working too hard. What they do is take a walk every Sunday, in their best clothes. When they are in front of a public house, Charlotte pretends to faint. The kind owner brings a bit of brandy for poor Charlotte. The next day, Noah reports to the police that the public house has broken the law by serving liquor on a Sunday. He is paid for informing.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Bumble lost their jobs. They became so poor they ended up their days in the very workhouse where Oliver had begun his life.

Charley Bates turned his back on a life of crime. He found work on a farm. Now he is the happiest herdsman in the county.

Mr. Brownlow adopted Oliver and moved to the country with him and Mrs. Bedwin. They live close to Rose and Harry.

In the altar of Harry Maylie's church is a white

stone tablet with the name *Agnes* on it. It is said that the spirit of Agnes Fleming sometimes comes to that altar. I believe it—even though the spot is in a church, and she was a weak and erring woman.

OLIVER TWIST

CHARLES DICKENS

"The workhouse offered the boys a wonderful choice. They could stay there and starve slowly—or they could leave and starve quickly."

Oliver Twist is a penniless orphan. What chance has he got on the dangerous streets of 19th century London? Before long, he's taken in by a gang of thieves. The boy's future looks grim indeed . . . until a few kindly souls enter the picture.

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